DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 396 593 HE 028 153

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TITLE	The Nation's Liberal Arts Colleges in an Age of Universities.
INSTITUTION	Pew Higher Education Roundtable, Philadelphia, PA.
SPONS AGENCY	Pew Charitable Trusts, Philadelphia, PA.
PUB DATE	Jan 95
NOTE	25p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Policy Perspectives, Institute for Research on Higher Education, 4200 Pine St., 5A, Philadelphia, PA 19104-4090.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)
JOURNAL CIT	Policy Perspectives; v5 n4 p1A-12B Jan 1995
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*College Role; Educational Policy; *Financial Problems; Financial Support; Higher Education; *Liberal Arts; Participant Satisfaction; *Social Values; Student Costs; Undergraduate Study

ABSTRACT

This theme issue of "Policy Perspectives" examines the role and survivability of liberal arts colleges in an age of universities. The lead essay, "Cross Currents," emphasizes that the liberal arts college embodies the ideal form of scholarly purpose and endeavor in undergraduate institutions, that the gap between the values inherent in a liberal education and the values of a society preoccupied with immediate returns causes financial distress for liberal arts colleges, and that the use of institutionally funded financial aid has become increasingly necessary to compete. The essay outlines strategies for dealing with these challenges. Several commentaries to the lead essay are presented, including: "Aspiring to Excellence" (Robert H. Edwards); "Teaching as Conversation" (Tom Gerety); "Building Cooperative Arrangements" (Mary Patterson McPherson); "Demonstrating Our Claims" (Kathryn Mohrman); "Rethinking Faculty Time" (Frederick C. Nahm); "Achieving Greater Coherence" (John Synodinos); and "A Different Vantage" (Richard Sisson). The final paper, "Giving Discounts, Getting Satisfaction: An Analysis of Institutions and Their Students," presents data from five institutions indicating that four of the five offered discounts to the majority of freshmen in 1992, and presents data from the Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium indicating that the overwhelming majority of students are pleased with the quality of their experiences. (JDD)

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P — O — L — I — C — Y

Jan. 1995
Volume 5
Number 4
Section A

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PERSPECTIVES

The Pew Higher Education Roundtable
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Cross Currents

They are like sailing ships beating against the wind. Taut in design, necessarily efficient in operation, they are crewed by seasoned veterans, their sense of themselves confirmed by the often arduous tasks they know they face. If from a distance they impart an image of classic form and grace, those who sail these uniquely American vessels know that such qualities in themselves cannot protect them from harm. They understand the winds have turned capricious, the currents tricky, even nasty. They sense danger in the sheer volume of super tankers and freighters parading the same waters, in whose wakes they risk being lost.

This issue of *Policy Perspectives* is about the nation's liberal arts colleges in an age of universities. The essay itself derived from a special roundtable of some two dozen liberal arts college presidents and deans—educational leaders who were concerned that "To Dance with Change" (*Policy Perspectives*, April 1994) seemed all too willing to celebrate societal values at odds with those of the academy itself. A letter to the Pew Higher Education Roundtable from David Porter, president of Skidmore College, was included in that same issue of *Policy Perspectives* and conveyed a concern that many others echoed. He found that "To Dance with Change" paid "virtually no attention to three points I consider central to education—especially at small colleges like mine—and which have never been more important than they are today:

1. The basic intellectual skills developed by a liberal education—assimilating information, analyzing its basic issues and coming up with one's own solutions, communicating one's conclusions—are the best possible preparation for, and the best hedge against, a world of rapid change. If one can "read, write, and think," one is ready for anything.

2. Although there are many approaches to developing these skills, the give-and-take of Socratic discourse is demonstrably the best, and may well be the *sine qua non*.

3. The same two points hold for another desideratum terribly important in today's world of flux, and terribly lacking in much education today: the development of strong values. A student acquires such values through the wide-ranging explorations of a liberal education, and through the give-and-take of tough-minded debate with professors and other students. . . .

"At the very time when those basic intellectual skills honed by a liberal education are especially relevant to our students' future—to a world of change—and at the very time when individuals with strong values are especially needed, it would be tragic and even perverse to surrender the very educational approaches that foster those ends."

In the starkest and most troubling terms, the question becomes: Why are liberal arts colleges declining in number?

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Why are the virtues that David Porter describes so readily overlooked, taken for granted, or forgotten by higher education's friends and critics? Why do so many dismiss a liberal arts education as the province of an elite few? Why do the media so seldom report the experiences and successes of liberal arts colleges as counter-examples to the profligate spending and neglect of students that is so readily portrayed when describing the nation's largest and most prestigious universities?

In the starkest and most troubling terms, the question becomes: Why are liberal arts colleges declining in number? A more cynical as well as an outsider's version of the same question may serve to bring the concerns into sharper focus: Who would suffer if a small set of apparently superannuated institutions quietly lost financial viability and disappeared?

An American Compass

The answer, most simply, is that all of higher education would be diminished by such a future. For many of those outside the academy and even more of us within, it is the liberal arts college—residential, devoted to instruction in a broad curriculum of the arts and sciences, designed as a place of growth and experimentation for the young—that remains the mind's shorthand for an undergraduate education at its best. Architecturally and philosophically, the liberal arts college embodies the ideal of learning as an act of community, in which students and faculty come together to explore and extend the foundations of knowledge. The intimacy of the residential setting, the emphasis placed on teaching, the celebration of the liberal arts as the foundation for a lifetime of learning—all define the ideal form of scholarly purpose and endeavor in undergraduate institutions.

Indeed, for more than a century, the ideal of the liberal arts college has served as higher education's compass. When larger institutions wish to design special undergraduate environments that would provide a quality experience in residential learning and mentorship, they build small sub-communities that replicate the model of the liberal arts college. As Tom Gerety, president of Amherst College, remarks, the liberal arts college embodies the ideal of teaching as conversation—an intellectual partnership among faculty and students that leads to a greater understanding on the part of both. It is the liberal arts college that best retains the language and imagery of education as a social compact between a community and its individual members—even as "community" has come to encompass a broader range of people and responsibilities. In this setting, acquiring knowledge is defined not just as a means to individual advancement but as a basis for assuming the mantle of social responsibility, of making constructive contributions to the community and larger society of which one is part.

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In pursuit of this ideal, the nation's liberal arts colleges have remained unambiguously committed to the learning engagement between professor and student. They have understood that remaining small and focused is important, that their flourishing does not depend on becoming all things to all people. They have adapted to changes in society, for the most part without transforming themselves into a fundamentally different kind of institution.

The reigning nostalgia for the 1950s notwithstanding, the nation's liberal arts colleges have also gotten substantially better over the last three decades. Their faculties are stronger, their students more diverse and accomplished, their curricula richer in the presentation of an increasingly complex world. In many ways, their hallmark has become their stubborn insistence that undergraduate science is essential, though the cost of fulfilling that commitment has grown enormously.

Getting better has entailed greater expense in every quarter—more money for financial aid, more for libraries, more to allow faculty to remain active in their disciplines, more for support staff, more for elaborate systems and facilities supporting the co-curricular dimensions of a residential college. For many colleges, the challenge now has become one of sustaining rather than enhancing quality—of finding enough new

moneys each year to balance the budget. The size of these institutions makes it difficult to achieve economies of scale; their commitment to a singular, well-defined mission makes them reluctant to pursue the kind of entrepreneurial enterprise that has come to characterize so many larger institutions and former liberal arts colleges.

Against the Wind

The irony is that the very strength of these institutions' commitment to the liberal arts should now be the source of their financial distress—a product of the growing gap between the values inherent in a liberal education and the values of a society increasingly preoccupied with immediate returns. The eagerness with which so many parents and their children seek out less expensive forms of education promising good jobs and professional careers is now matched by the eagerness of governments to protect those student-consumers from institutions that promise more than they can deliver. Included in that protection is the notion that there ought to be a demonstrable relationship between the tuition that consumers pay and the likely salary they will earn upon graduation.

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What liberal arts colleges fear most is that their particular kind of educational experience may come to be regarded as a quaint relic, more precious than important, pursued by a handful of students who seek mainly the status and credentialing that a degree from a private institution confers. It is an outcome made more likely by the public's preoccupation with the stated price of a college education. Irrational or not, higher education's greatest vulnerability remains the now-pervasive sense that it has engaged in price gouging—that colleges and universities have secured their own well-being at the expense of those they are expected to serve. And, like it or not, even the most efficient and cost-effective liberal arts college is lumped with the most profligate university simply because it has increased its price at the same basic rate.

This pricing dilemma is the first of the paradoxes now confronting the nation's liberal arts colleges:

- as institutions with a strong commitment to providing students an education in the arts and sciences, liberal arts colleges are among the most uncomfortable with the notion of students as customers and consumers, yet they find themselves increasingly shaped by the vicissitudes of the market for postsecondary education—both in terms of the programs and amenities they are expected to offer and the prices they are expected to charge;

- as institutions with a historic commitment to need-based financial aid, liberal arts colleges are finding that the kind of education they champion is increasingly sought by those who cannot afford it—or at least by those who qualify for financial aid as opposed to those able to pay the full cost of their educations;

- as the set of institutions most committed to the concept of residential learning, liberal arts colleges are experiencing troublesome fractures within their campus communities that are at odds with the values that inform their educational mission;

- as institutions that have remained deliberately small in order to maintain an atmosphere of intimacy and quality learning, liberal arts colleges find themselves at a competitive disadvantage with the universities that train faculty, establish the research standards faculty everywhere pursue, and increasingly claim to offer the same educational values as liberal arts colleges—small classes, residential settings, attentive faculty—in addition to more facilities, greater diversity, and a fuller range of vocational and professional programs of study.

To Market, To Market

No institution, no matter how selective, can claim to have found safe harbor from changes in the perceived needs and expectations of students. Just how tough and how persistent those market pressures have become is apparent in the testimony of two seasoned champions of the liberal arts in general and of liberal arts colleges in particular. The first of these is Bill Ambler, long-time dean of admissions of Haverford College. Near the end of his career in 1986, Ambler catalogued just how much his job had changed in the 30 years since he had joined the College's admissions office. In the course of those years, Haverford had transformed itself into a national institution, becoming more diverse, less parochial, less homogeneous in terms of the origins and backgrounds of its students. That transformation was not easily or quickly achieved. In the 1950s, Ambler recalled, Haverford "had a black and white view booklet with a plain gray Quaker cover. I was told that it was very expensive and that I should only give it to people who I was sure were going to enroll." By the mid-1980s, Ambler headed a professional staff of four full-time admissions officers. He was mailing a four-color brochure to anyone who asked—and many who didn't. He had invested in a video production, regularly cultivated 900 high school counselors, and ran "an overnight visitor's service which at times threaten[ed] to turn the College into a motel."

Their flourishing depends directly on how well they present their programs to students and parents who are increasingly vocal in spelling out the services they expect, the amenities they want, and the prices they are prepared to pay.

What Bill Ambler and his colleagues across the country had discovered was the power, as well as the cost, of marketing—an endeavor the very success of which would alter their institutions in ways they neither intended nor imagined. Frederick Rudolph is dean of college historians, principal drafter of the Association of American Colleges' *Integrity in the College Curriculum*, and now professor emeritus at Williams College, where he spent most of his academic career. In 1993, Rudolph recounted the evolution of Williams College across two centuries, from its origins as a "Christian college," through its evolution into a "gentleman's college," and to today's "consumer college." There was more than a hint of irony in his depiction of what he suspected might be the College's penultimate phase—a consumer college that was likely to cater as much to students' social needs and desires as to their intellectual development. While Rudolph understood that in the course of its transformations Williams had held "true to its founding and continuing purpose: the training of a governing elite," he observed that much of what has changed about Williams was not of the College's own choosing. "It would be a mistake to think that Williams chooses to be a consumer's college," he noted. "It is required to be a consumer's college if it also chooses to be selective and competitive."

What is true of Williams is true of all colleges today, whether they are considered "selective" or not. Their flourishing depends directly on how well they present their programs to students and parents who are increasingly vocal in spelling out the services they expect, the amenities they want, and the prices they are prepared to pay. It is a market in which the hallmarks of educational quality have become reputation and prestige, as measured in terms of selectivity and standing in the "best college" rankings that have come to dominate public discussion of individual colleges.

Increasingly, it is a market that wants to be assured that an investment in a liberal education will prove worthwhile. Students no longer represent a homogeneous entity, confident of their place in the world their parents have made. Fewer students today are inclined to accept demurely the institution's definition of what a liberal arts education should be. They are less prone to value education for its own sake, more concerned that the dollars they invest in education should have a tangible return in a well-paying job. The question being asked across these colleges is just how much the institution will have to change in order to satisfy these demands: In order to keep their classes filled, will it be necessary to alter course substantially?

Dialing for Dollars

Answering that question has become all the more problematic in the face of new demands that colleges should deliver more but cost less. No issue differentiates liberal arts colleges more than the question of the

scale and purpose of financial aid. On the one hand, there remain perhaps a dozen institutions with substantial endowments and robust applicant pools that still use financial aid to shape the class, creating more diversity, reaching out to new populations, preserving the principle of equal access. Most liberal arts colleges, however, are increasingly using financial aid as a means to fill a class. Many now award some form of financial aid to upwards of 70 percent of their students; almost all of them aid more than half of their students, and a few provide grants and scholarships to more than 90 percent of their first-year students. While the "sticker prices" charged by these institutions have continued to rise faster than inflation, most of the new revenue—often as much as 70 cents on each dollar of tuition increase—is returned in the form of new financial aid awards to both new and continuing students.

For these institutions, each year is proving more costly than the last. Colleges that three years ago were discounting their tuition revenues 25 percent—that is, spending 25 cents in institutionally funded financial aid for every dollar of tuition they received—this year discounted their tuitions more than 35 percent to bring in a new first-year class. Each year, more is budgeted for institutional aid, and nearly every year the actual cost of matriculating the first-year class exceeds the budgeted amount. The leaders of these institutions can only feel bemused at the thought of themselves as the skippers of well-designed sailing sloops caught in tricky winds and nasty currents. From their vantage point, the more apt analogy is that of a helmsman of a white-water raft navigating an increasingly treacherous river. When each fall the run is completed and the first-year class is safely on campus, it is the prospect of having to "shoot the rapids" again next year that haunts their nights.

A variety of factors accounts for the distress that leaders of liberal arts institutions feel. For a decade now, the number of young people prepared to proceed directly from high school to college has been declining. This growing imbalance between the demand for traditional higher education and its supply would, in itself, be sufficient to account first for the limiting and then for the reduction of the net price (tuition minus financial aid) private institutions effectively charge. What has caused the greatest dislocation, however, is the withdrawal of federal funds from student aid programs that benefit middle-income students, who have been the mainstays of most institutions. Just as the competition for the reduced number of high school graduates has intensified, liberal arts colleges have found themselves drawing increasingly on their own funds, generated for the most part from tuitions, to offset the loss of federal moneys.

In retrospect, the results are not surprising. Across all of private higher education, there has been an intensified search for students who both are qualified academically and are prepared to pay the full price of their educations. The tools developed by Bill Ambler and his colleagues have been sharpened and refined in an attempt to ensure their institutions a paying clientele. The marketing has become more intense and sophisticated, the packaging of campuses and programs more artful and pervasive.

Simultaneously there has been an important recasting of the nature and purposes of financial aid. Programs that were once seen as ways of "leveling the playing field" between those who could and could not afford to attend a private institution have become themselves a means for recruiting students—offering better packages (more grant, less loan) to those students the institution wanted most. It has been but a short step further to the offering of "merit aid"—first smaller, then larger, awards and scholarships. The logic was all but irrefutable. If offering a very good student a modest scholarship encouraged that student to enroll, the college gained 90 percent of the revenue that would have been otherwise lost, the student attended an institution that really wanted his or her enrollment, and a not-so-subtle message was sent that good grades and academic achievements could reap tangible rewards.

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It has also been, alas, a logic of diminishing returns. Discounts—and that is essentially what merit aid has proved to be—make economic sense only if what is lost

on each sale is made up for by increased volume. When increased discounting is coupled with decreasing enrollment, the result is less tuition revenue, no matter how high the "sticker price" is raised. The short-term instinct has been to promise more, to deepen the discount in order to recoup lost volume. What one institution promises thus becomes the base for another institution's counter-offer. It has not taken students and their families long to learn the new rules of the game—to discover that a friendly phone call to a financial aid office in the spring (when students are choosing among the colleges that have offered them admission) may well result in a "revised offer" of financial aid. The students call it "dialing for dollars."

Students and their parents are coming to see a college education as just one more commodity, the price of which is subject to artful as well as persistent negotiation.

At every turn, then, it is the college that is the loser. Financial aid, which began as a means of building and diversifying the student body, has become a principal means to ensure that each fall the institution meets its enrollment goals. Colleges are being required to spend more—for marketing, for new facilities, for additional programs, services, and amenities, and above all, for institutionally funded financial aid—just to hold their own in the increasingly competitive market for students. Students and their parents are coming to see a college education as just one more commodity, the price of which is subject to artful as well as persistent negotiation. Even for the dozen or so liberal arts colleges with sufficient endowments to fund their financial aid programs, a new and persistent cynicism has been introduced into the process—a pervasive belief that the process of qualifying for aid is intrusive as well as overly complex, that it too often rewards families that have not saved, as well as families that resort to "creative accounting"—what one president called "scandalous fabrications"—to garner an offer of financial aid for a son or daughter. And all the while the institution finds itself under increasing financial pressure, forced to choose between preserving physical plant, rewarding faculty and staff, and investing in new initiatives.

Residentiality

Whatever their financial vicissitudes, liberal arts colleges have sought to protect the academic core. The faculties of these institutions exhibit no ambiguity in their commitment to teaching. Their continuing discussions of what should be taught and how to teach it attest to a healthy tension between the push for specialization and the pull of their traditional commitment to integrated and coherent curricula. Liberal arts colleges rightfully have worried least about the quality of their academic programs.

What nags these institutions today, however, is a suspicion that the toughest challenge they face may yet be the preservation of themselves as coherent communities with a commitment to scholarship, on the one hand, and to diversity and civility on the other. The concept of a residential learning community is the cornerstone of a liberal arts college. Often the promotional materials produced by these institutions prominently feature a photograph of the campus taken from the air. The view from above helps to impress the vision of a college as a place that sees itself whole, as a distinct, even self-contained unit within the landscape of society. Today, it is also an outdated imagery. What has changed is America itself—that and the fact that the college's hard-won diversity has made it a community less given to settled ways. In an earlier time the college had defined its purpose as a conveyer of knowledge, skills, and values to a population of young people, most of whom had grown up in the same social order and had been nurtured in the same values. The college's mantle of authority derived in part from the intellectual tradition of the arts and sciences, but it also derived in substantial measure from an intuitive compact between a community and its individual members. The college and its faculty educated from the knowledge that the framework of expectations they worked within was part of a continuum—an extension of a social compact that had always been an integral part of their students' lives.

No college today assumes that it knows best, or that all of those whom it educates are essentially the same. It is a time of centrifugal rather than centripetal forces, of an impulse for separateness that makes the parts more important than the whole. It is also a time of decreasing civility and increasing tension, of substance abuse, personal harassment, and racial and ethnic dissonance. The small residential campus of a liberal arts college would seem the ideal setting for building new bonds

among different groups, and there are instances in which significant new bridges result from the efforts of the campus community to define itself anew. But the very compactness of the liberal arts college can also work to its disadvantage, for there is "no place to hide," no large and dispersed student body having separate nooks and crannies to offer temporary sanctuary.

This same set of tensions and transformations has had its effect on the faculty as well. To their own and their students' relief, they too have come to represent society more broadly. They are no longer village elders, mostly white, almost always male. All too often, however, they seek to distance themselves from the common community, leaving the values and habits of mind that inform the classroom disconnected from those that form the social life of campus. Young faculty in particular are driven by pressures to make scholarly contributions to their disciplines in addition to developing their skills as teachers and mentors to students. Many faculty have two-career marriages which compel them to reside a considerable distance from campus. Faculty of both sexes now share child-rearing responsibilities. With their lives more personally complex, their institutional identities become less distinct, their interactions with students more limited to the classroom and lab, and their relationships with colleagues more formal and less frequent. There is less common talk across the campus, more of a sense of colleagues who, in the name of collegiality, have "struck all kinds of silences among themselves."

No college today assumes that it knows best, or that all of those whom it educates are essentially the same. It is a time of centrifugal rather than centripetal forces, of an impulse for separateness that makes the parts more important than the whole. It is also a time of decreasing civility and increasing tension.

A further sense of isolation on many campuses results from the disappointment faculty often feel in finding so few of the students they "want to teach"—serious, interested in disciplinary specialization, likely to go on to graduate school—enrolled in their courses. Many faculty suppose that such students, who are often idealized from their own memories of graduate school, must exist somewhere, and that they must be enrolling in other institutions. This sense of disappointment can be felt by students and reciprocated through an apparent disregard for what the faculty values.

Cost, Price, and Subsidy

The men and women responsible for the nation's liberal arts colleges are a tough bunch—quick to defend the traditions and practices of their institutions, impatient with those who too easily lump their colleges with the rest of higher education.

Most leaders of liberal arts colleges are optimists as well as realists. They bring to arduous tasks a kind of infectious enthusiasm that seems to belie the vulnerability they otherwise might convey. They are hopeful that the coming rise in the number of young people seeking admission to college will result in increased enrollments, thus reducing some of the competitive and financial pressures their institutions face. They are relieved that the recent reauthorization of federal student aid programs will make it easier and more likely that students and families will spread out the cost of a college education over a decade or more—and alarmed by the regulatory intrusions that have accompanied these new programs. Increasingly, they and their faculties are taking on the issues of campus cohesion, scholarly fragmentation, and curricular and co-curricular integration.

Much more than they are given credit for, these institutions have also taken a tough look at how and why they spend their moneys. They have reduced staffs, reorganized functions, held the line on raises and new positions. Still, they feel trapped, knowing that their costs continue to creep up even as their capacities to raise new revenues seem diminished. In large part, it is not a world of their making. The prices they can charge are influenced largely by the pricing and financial aid policies of the private research universities. They need to keep some reasonable pace with the kinds of investments a research university makes to attract and retain research faculty; for liberal arts colleges, this does not necessarily mean matching the investment of larger institutions, but it does mean not falling hopelessly behind. In order for liberal arts colleges to remain attractive to students, there are parallel investments that

must be made, on the one hand, in libraries, technologies, and related research facilities, and on the other, in student life and in athletic facilities.

Liberal arts colleges are tired of being told they need to become leaner and meaner, that they ought to consider reducing their permanent payrolls by 25 percent over five years, or that they need to be more business-like, more efficient, more productive, less costly. They are not likely to see their students as either customers or clients, but rather as investors and partners in an enterprise that probably needs to spend more rather than less money on programs and facilities. And yet they know the pressure for reduced costs is not likely to abate; there will, in fact, be no sanctuary from the competitive pressures of a market for postsecondary education.

How such circumstances are perceived by those within these institutions is probably best reflected in the concluding session of a roundtable discussion at one of the first liberal arts colleges to join the Pew Higher Education Roundtable. This institution required an additional 200 students to attain financial viability, and its campus roundtable had carried on a remarkable conversation, frank in its assessment of current practices, more than willing to discuss head-on the fragmentation of the campus community. Faculty had worried aloud about the increasing distance they felt from their students, the lack of the kind of conversations that could link their institutional and disciplinary boundaries. They had explored their own commitment to the liberal arts and their students' uncertainty and anxiety about what happens after graduation. With adjournment upon them, one participant asked—"What about costs and the call in 'To Dance with Change' to reduce staff, to increase the use of outside vendors, and to use technology to increase productivity rather than to enhance quality?" The facilitator demurred, they had done enough.

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The discussion, however, would not be denied. For the next half hour the members of the roundtable rehearsed all the arguments as to why "To Dance with Change" did not apply to them—there was no duplication here, no administrative frills, far less specialization than one would find in a university, faculty and staff who had already accepted lower salaries rather than see essential programs cut. When the lamentation threatened to become a sustaining whine, one of the younger faculty members told her colleagues she had had enough. "If we were told to cut 20 percent," she declared, "we would complain, but then we would go about the business of doing what was necessary." Thereafter followed an animated exploration, for the most part led by the younger faculty, of what might be done. Frank questions were asked about the nature of the college's finances—how it had come to have a structural deficit, and how an annual shortfall in tuition revenues, brought about by too few new matriculants and too much spent on financial aid, was limiting the college's capacity to compete for students, faculty, and gifts.

No administration or faculty eagerly seeks out this assignment. But the shifts and downsizing have nonetheless begun on most liberal arts campuses. Wesleyan University, for example, is in the process of reducing faculty lines by 6 percent and student affairs expenditures by 20 percent—and is doing so despite a substantial endowment and robust applicant pool. What each college is discovering for itself is the particular limits tough times are imposing on its own economy.

Out of these discussions a collective agenda for the nation's liberal arts colleges has begun to form. The most basic questions are about the sector itself—will it matter to the best-endowed and most selective among them if the absolute number of liberal arts colleges declines? Are their futures sufficiently interdependent to warrant more collective action? Given current legal constraints, what might they do to lessen the competition among themselves, to reduce the discounting as well as to lessen the costs associated with bringing in each new class?

At the same time, there is a growing sense that, without increased external support, too many liberal arts colleges will be recast by the market itself—

becoming more entrepreneurial, less committed to residential programs designed principally to educate the young. As Daniel Sullivan, president of Allegheny College, has eloquently reminded us, without real subsidies, most liberal arts colleges cannot afford to fulfill the educational role they have so ardently championed.

What will be expected is a capacity to experiment that is matched by a commitment to preservation. What more might be expected, what more might be contributed? How might these institutions that have done it best in the past come to do even better in the future?

The case will certainly be made anew to public agencies that it is in the nation's interest to provide a crucial part of that subsidy, principally by providing increased federal and state funding for student financial aid. It is a case that will stress the central role the nation's liberal arts colleges have played in the democratizing of American higher education. It is no small irony that even as they mount this appeal, liberal arts colleges may have to spend more time fending off the threat of local property and related taxes in a political climate that is likely to be less rather than more friendly to higher education.

It is also likely that most colleges, in making their case, will stress the importance of a liberal education in providing leaders to every sector and at every level of society. But that will not be enough. An appeal focused solely on this, the historic mission of the nation's liberal arts colleges, will prove attractive principally to those already convinced—alumni, friends, and the limited set of charitable foundations that, in the past, have supported these institutions.

Few liberal arts colleges will be so foolish as to pin their hopes for survival on the chance of being thrown a line by the generous impulses of others. The challenge to these institutions in the coming age is to proceed on their own—maintaining their commitment to the liberal arts, applying their navigational skills to achieve an ideal that continues to have meaning and importance for institutions of higher education caught in the cross currents of changing times and altered circumstances. What will be expected is a capacity to experiment that is matched by a commitment to preservation. What more might be expected, what more might be contributed? How might these institutions that have done it best in the past come to do even better in the future—particularly given a future in which success is likely to require a commitment to both change and constancy?

- **Sustain and strengthen the practice of teaching as conversation.** What is required are faculty who exemplify the conviction that teaching and learning are fundamentally dialogue between professor and student. The result ought to be institutional settings that reinforce a mentoring relationship best characterized by a willingness on the part of faculty to listen and respond to students in ways that generate an enduring passion for learning and discovery.

- **Use the compactness of the residential campus to establish civil as well as affirming communities.** At worst, the small size and intimate nature of these college campuses can result in an amplified sense of discord and animosity; at best, however, these institutions can, by their own example, demonstrate how diversity becomes a community's most compelling strength.

- **Take the lead in the systematic review of the undergraduate curriculum—the task Frederick Rudolph and the Association of American Colleges summoned them to nearly a decade ago.** That effort needs to focus explicitly on the coherence of the curriculum, its current commitment to disciplinary specialization, and its capacity to sustain the mentoring and related experiences that are the hallmarks of a liberal arts education. Liberal arts colleges need to remind themselves as well as others that a major advantage of their smaller size is their ability to develop programs and course offerings that combine the substance and method of different academic disciplines, that explore new avenues of inquiry and discourse, and that foster new modes of thinking and organization.

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- **Develop economic efficiencies.** Building on the advantages of focused mission, liberal arts colleges need to ensure that their expenditures reinforce educational purposes. They will have to explore new ways to become efficient, considering both the enhancements to learning and the cost savings that the new technologies can yield.

- **Build truly collaborative networks.** The scale and focus of liberal arts colleges have also enabled them to enter readily into partnerships with one another—sharing resources in ways that provide both individual and collective enhancement to their learning environments. In the future, liberal arts colleges will have to make these collaborations more extensive as well as practical, building environments of truly shared resources, as exemplified in the linkages between Haverford, Bryn Mawr, and Swarthmore Colleges or, more generally, in the clusters of colleges within the Pew Science Program in Undergraduate Education. They will have to succeed in establishing parallel linkages with research universities, despite the latter's past reluctance to commit sustaining resources to such joint ventures.

- **Ask again who is likely to benefit from the kind of education liberal arts colleges offer.** Is it only those with high test scores and lofty academic aspirations? What of the "average" student who wants to learn, who wants to prepare for life outside the academy and is not likely to seek immediate admission to a program offering a professional post-baccalaureate degree?

If these challenges are not met—if the curriculum the faculty deliver is principally designed to satisfy themselves and their own definitions of academic excellence, if liberal arts colleges do not sustain their commitment to superior teaching, sharpen and enhance curriculum, develop efficiencies, strengthen the bonds that link their campus communities, reach out to a broad array of promising students, and extend their ties with other institutions—then they are likely to continue to decline in number. Those that remain will be those with the economic means to survive as institutions principally designed to prepare students for admission into advanced programs offering degrees in a handful of learned professions. On the other hand, if a liberal arts education is defined as one broadly applicable to the world of tomorrow—if, in fact, the liberal arts colleges and their faculties learn to moderate that competition among themselves that defines success only in terms of academic credentials and institutional selectivity—then the educational leadership that only liberal arts colleges can supply is not only necessary but truly deserving of extraordinary support from the nation at large.

David Breneman in his recent work, *Liberal Arts Colleges: Thriving, Surviving, or Endangered?*, reminds us that these institutions were once the dominant suppliers of undergraduate education—at the turn of the century enrolling nearly seven out of every ten undergraduates. Their capacity then to define the nature of American undergraduate education reflected a hegemony of numbers as well as a dominance of form. Today the answer to Breneman's question lies in the sustaining power of that form and its ability to balance change and constancy.

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Policy Perspectives is a publication of the Pew Higher Education Roundtable, sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts.

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"Cross Currents," the lead essay of this Policy Perspectives, *is based on a special roundtable of liberal arts college presidents and deans, convened in July 1994 to focus on the issues facing these institutions. The following individuals served as participants in that discussion and helped to shape the resulting essay:*

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PERSPECTIVES

NONPROFIT ORGAN.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 2563
PHILADELPHIA, PA

Jan. 1995
Volume 5
Number 4
Section B

POLICY
PERSPECTIVES
The Pew Higher Education Roundtable
Sponsored by the Pew Charitable Trusts

Voices

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Aspiring to Excellence

by Robert H. Edwards

President, Bowdoin College

Peter Drucker, the management expert, has been forecasting the end of liberal arts colleges for 20 years. We are lost, he says, between the comprehensive research universities with their economies of scale and specializations, and the religious colleges, who really understand what communities are. But he and other more sympathetic writers who would preserve us for reasons some use to preserve the "family farm"—partly nostalgic, partly aesthetic—miss a central point. It is also obscured by the "Cross Currents" essay's accurate, telling, but obsessive concentration on costs, financial aid, and the decline of residential life.

Our indispensable characteristic is our intellectual quality. If we do not aspire to it—select faculty and students for it, define our construction and technological priorities by it—the world will justly send its brightest sons and daughters elsewhere. If our response to the demand for quality is like Mr. Doolittle's about his

morals—"can't afford 'em, guv"—we will be justly succeeded by better exercise clubs. As one of our faculty members told me, "I can teach for everyone in the class only when I teach for the very best." Not to aspire to the highest intellectual and ethical excellence is to betray and counterfeit our profession.

We continue to read Aristotle, Thomas More, and Cardinal Newman about intellectual and moral growth because they remind us that refining the mind and character of young people is a duty of the highest order for each age. It is not a duty acquitted in "niches" or through "economies of scale." It is carried out on a scale in which human beings recognize common standards of quality and establish personal claims and obligations upon one another.

Technology and finance are vitally important, but our main job as liberal arts colleges is to focus our skeptical but intelligent, hopeful faculty on the great question: What is the highest educational quality to which we can aspire in our times, and what, within our means, must we do to attain it? If people believe our colleges represent this excellence single-mindedly, with no tolerance of mediocrity or dishonesty, we may continue to have an almighty financial struggle, but we shall preserve our claim upon their very best.

Teaching as Conversation

by Tom Gerety

President, Amherst College

"In the beginning," wrote John Locke in the Second Treatise of Government, "all the world was America." Locke meant to capture in this sentence the wildness of nature, including human nature, in the condition that preceded civil society. But he caught as well a sense of Europe and America as strangers: encountering one another on the edge of this continent, on the shorelines to the east of us and in the woods that surround us still. This America, the America of strangeness and difference, was to produce many innovations, some wonderful and some horrible: race slavery; the decimation and subjugation of the native peoples we encountered here; the sweatshops of our cities and the bigotry of our laws. All these were horrors. But they do not blot out the wonders; our music with its looseness and force; our poetry with its openness and oddity; our humor, our enterprise, our astounding if only occasional generosity as a people.

One of America's most lasting innovations was a written constitution. We were the first to interpret the written words of a fundamental law as binding on even the most powerful among us. Constitutional law, open to debate and to change, but upheld by judges backed by the might of the government—this was new and even now remains wonderful.

Among our inventions, no less wondrous, no less American in Locke's sense, I would place the liberal arts college.

We know that universities grew up in Europe long before Europeans settled here. And we know that the colleges—the special residence halls at Paris and Oxford, at Cambridge and Bologna—developed within the universities along with their great faculties.

The liberal arts college began here as a religious school. In it, the arts of the free citizen—the liberal arts—were subsumed under the religious mission not only of the school but of the society as a whole. Amherst was not much different in this in the 1820s from Harvard in the 1630s or Yale in the 1700s.

Up until the Civil War, the liberal arts college more or less defined higher education in America. Then all the world was Amherst. Harvard and Yale, Princeton and Columbia, Williams and Trinity and Union: all were colleges of roughly similar size and ambition. Some were more secular and some more innovative than others. Some, like Oberlin and Swarthmore and Berea, put women on an equal basis with men. They, along with Amherst, challenged the rest of America to set aside race as a qualification for study. Others, like Mount Holyoke and later Smith and others, pushed the country to honor women's abilities and ambitions.

Then began the great expansion, public and private, that was to remake the landscape in higher education. Suddenly, universities were everywhere, with a variety of faculties, graduate and professional as well as undergraduate, and all with a new sense of mission and a new confidence about their relation to the country's future. The land grant colleges made possible the emergence of large public universities like our own Univer-

sity of Massachusetts. The founding of Johns Hopkins spurred our Ivy League brethren to grow into collections of schools, with the undergraduate colleges prominent but no longer truly dominant.

By the 1880s, a Columbia professor could write that the colleges were finished, caught between boarding schools and the new universities. "It will be largely a waste of capital to maintain them," he declared, "and largely a waste of time to attend them."

The universities saved us from a narrow parochial world that threatened to smother what it once had nurtured. "Electives," "majors," "research": all these began in the transatlantic dialogue that transformed higher education. It became a massive engine that could serve the nation and the world as no liberal arts college could hope to. The sheer scale of the enterprise was beyond us. Responding to the massive shift around us, we struggled to retain a sense of purpose. It was not easy; it would never be easy again.

Where once Amherst and schools like it educated the great majority of those Americans who were to lead in government and the professions, in business and the arts, now we educate only a slight fraction of those who study beyond high school. The question of our purpose sharpens: Why should the liberal arts college—not just Amherst but the family of such colleges—why *should* the liberal arts college survive and prosper? In the age of the university, what have we to offer our students and the world?

The answer to my questions lies in the conjunction, the radical conjunction, of teaching and learning: we in the liberal arts colleges believe that teacher and student must stand face to face in the many conversations that are the work of both: we believe in teaching as conversation because the best teaching is conversation; except by dialogue we cannot do our work.

The college, unlike the university, takes the dialogue of professor and student as a master principle. Neither graduate students nor teaching assistants can spell us in this central portion of our vocation. Our scale and our intimacy, our flexibility in moving across and among fields, our openness to one another and to our students—these are the strengths of a community built on dialogue. Yes, we are specialists, but we are also generalists: intellectuals first, with a curiosity that does not stop at the boundaries of one discipline but pushes on to ask about the disciplines of our colleagues.

The temptation, from afar, is to say that scholarship in such a setting must be slighted in favor of teaching. But Amherst, with others, holds that these are complementary aspects of one vocation.

One can teach, perhaps, with more or less permanent authority from a fixed store of learning. That sort of teaching holds little interest here. We teach instead what we learn and *as* we learn—not once and for all but over and again, renewing our knowledge as we test it and push it and extend it.

There is an important sense in which, at their very best, teaching and research become one. The best teaching searches out new questions and new insights: and the best research always teaches.

Ours is an old conversation, but we must make it new for every student and in every classroom. We must make it as open as possible—to ideas, of course, but to people as well, to our differences, to our clashes of conviction, of style, of temperament and background. Ultimately, ours is a conversation about who we are and what we can do in our world. It is about freedom and what we can make of it. It is about reality and how we can understand it. It is about the imagination and how it can draw us towards wisdom—and towards each other.

To all who would study in this tradition, we say: "Come to Amherst if you would join us in this work. Never mind whether you are rich or poor. Never mind where or how you live. Say only that you would bring to this conversation all of your curiosity, your intelligence, your passion. Say that you would engage with others in argument and exploration wherever it leads. Say that whatever else you do with your life you would take learning to heart as your calling, the calling of the scholar and teacher."

Excerpted from a Presidential Inauguration Speech given at Amherst College, October 23, 1994.

Building Cooperative Arrangements

by Mary Patterson McPherson

President, Bryn Mawr College

"Cross Currents" wisely addresses the challenges that confront the liberal arts college. Those committed to the continued success of these institutions in educating the nation's young must engage the central question the essay poses: How do we retain our allegiance to the traditional virtues of a liberal arts education when the value of those virtues is no longer widely apparent?

While the essay does well to restate the Pew Roundtable's commitment to those virtues and to suggest alternative measures to meet the challenges, it mentions only in passing an important strategy that many small liberal arts schools have adopted: cooperative arrangements between and among colleges and universities. Such arrangements can function as a series of concentric circles that extend the reach of an institution. They enable the institution to continue to offer the many virtues of small size while at the same time overcoming some of the limitations of those virtues by offering to students a more extensive range of courses and opportunities. Cooperative arrangements also sustain the sense of education as a conversation among communities of scholars by extending educational networks in richly complex ways.

Demonstrating Our Claims

by Kathryn Mohrman

President, Colorado College

Public suspicion of higher education. Student concern about careers. Family anxiety about the cost of education. All these factors influence the ability of liberal arts colleges to maintain their traditional mission.

Those of us on liberal arts campuses have several choices: We can deplore the lack of public support for our tradition, we can change our programs to meet current demands, or we can talk about the kind of education we deliver in terms that make sense to today's students and families. I find the last of these options the most attractive.

Today's students have genuine concerns to which we must respond. We can demonstrate our substantial investment in financial aid, making the seemingly high cost of education more affordable for many families. Students' worries about employment are very real, given the uncertainties of the economy. At Colorado College, we addressed career concerns by writing and producing a 14-minute video entitled "Marketing Your Liberal Arts Skills in the Interview." We can also reassure them that liberal arts graduates do get good jobs; we can do a better job of tracking our alumni and showing the variety of careers our graduates pursue.

Most importantly, we can articulate more clearly than ever before—and in ways that make sense in today's environment—that a liberal arts education is a good investment. The skills and flexibility developed by study in the liberal arts and sciences provide the best protection against the vagaries of an uncertain and rapidly changing world. I also believe that we can demonstrate our claims in more persuasive ways than we have traditionally done.

Merely asserting the values of a liberal education may no longer be enough. Suspicious people want evidence for our claims—and they deserve an answer. In addition to pointing to the success of our graduates, we can show in much more explicit ways how we foster valuable skills and abilities commensurate with the investment we make.

Here are some examples of the kinds of evidence we might use to make our case to a public no longer willing to take our claims at face value. Let me give examples from Colorado College, not because we are necessarily the best at delivering on any of these factors, but to demonstrate that such evidence is obtainable even at a college that does not make a big commitment to institutional research.

What proportion of undergraduate classes have fewer than 20 students compared with the proportion that have 50 or more students? Smaller classes are more likely to engage students actively with professors and with classmates. The long-term skills that students are likely to develop in small classes include discussion,

analysis, and oral presentation; they also tend to learn more when they are personally engaged with the material. In fact, research conducted by Alexander Astin at UCLA suggested that involvement is the single factor that best correlates with student satisfaction and student persistence to graduation. At Colorado College, we have no classes over 50 students, and last academic year our average class size was about 15.

What proportion of courses use student-focused methods in the classroom rather than lectures for more than half of total class hours? Just as small classes encourage student involvement rather than passive listening, so do discussions, group projects, field trips, and other "non-traditional" methods. In a survey of Colorado College faculty last spring, 84 percent reported that they use "involving" methods in their courses. As a result, students in those classes are practicing the oral skills, analytical reasoning, and collaborative group work habits they will need in the work world after college.

What proportion of courses taught include off-campus experiences such as field trips, observations, internships, community service, and so on? Academic study can be enhanced by appropriate links to the world beyond the classroom. Through activities in the community and the natural world, students see the application of theoretical knowledge to practical problems. In addition, some off-campus experiences give students exposure to civic responsibility and possible vocations, both useful opportunities for our society's future leaders. In a survey of CC students last spring, 33 percent reported some kind of experiential option.

What proportion of courses taught focus on concepts, topics, authors, and/or materials dealing with international issues? If students are preparing to live and work in an increasingly global society, they need to develop knowledge and experience about other nations in their academic work. College today can no longer look only at the United States and Europe. In the same student survey cited above, undergraduates at Colorado College reported that 46 percent of their courses addressed non-Western topics; 23 percent said that study of international non-Western issues formed the majority of the course.

What proportion of courses taught focus on concepts, topics, authors, and /or materials dealing with gender, race, and ethnicity? Students will be more effective professionals and citizens in a culturally diverse nation if they have knowledge and experience about people different from themselves. Our student survey reported that about half the courses last spring discussed the cultural richness of our society in some way, although very few of those courses focused primarily on such topics.

How much emphasis is given to the development of writing skills throughout the curriculum? Good communications skills are essential to both academic and later success after graduation, and the best way to improve written communication is to write often. Last spring, CC students reported that writing ability was stressed in 70 percent of their classes; their professors reported a wide range of writing assignments in those same courses, ranging from essay exams and research papers to journals and translations from a foreign language.

What proportion of students participate in some form of voluntary community service? A college education should encourage good citizenship as well as a well developed intellect; dealing first-hand with social issues is one way to develop civic responsibility. Last year, 65 percent of all CC students volunteered in the community in some way; one of the most impressive activities is a student-run soup kitchen every Sunday in the campus chapel.

Most liberal arts colleges have similar statistics dealing with the academic process, some certainly more compelling than the ones I have presented. Linking such evidence to the genuine concerns of students and families helps to make the case for the liberal arts. Such statistics reassure our publics that an education in the liberal arts and sciences is a good investment for the future.

Our students are partners in the educational process. As Tom Gerety points out in this issue of *Policy Perspectives*, teaching is fundamentally an act of conversation. We can begin by engaging students and their families in a discussion of the fundamental goals of a liberal education—and by showing them how study undertaken for the inherent love of learning can also contribute to their personal and professional growth after graduation.

This issue of *Policy Perspectives* calls upon liberal arts colleges to deal more effectively with external forces. We can allow ourselves to be tarred with the same brush as other, quite different, institutions of

higher education; we can shift our mission to meet the changing needs of our society; we can talk about ourselves in more compelling ways to students, families, and the general public. We can also band together to make the case for our particular brand of undergraduate education.

For me, and for Colorado College, the educational approach has great appeal. After all, education is our fundamental business. In addition to fostering learning in our classrooms, we can educate a larger public about the contributions of liberal education in an uncertain world—in terms that appeal to that broader audience. Who will join with me in a public campaign for liberal education?

Rethinking Faculty Time

by Frederick C. Nahm

President, Knox College

Of all the matters discussed by the leaders of liberal arts colleges who gathered last July to take account of the circumstances facing their institutions, by far the toughest was the issue of faculty time. In fact, it was so difficult that the conversation seemed to veer away from the topic whenever it came up—as if our collective denial of the problem might cause it to go away. But it won't go away. By any measure, the best national liberal arts colleges have loaded increasingly more work on their faculties. Yet we still define ourselves–and certainly promote our institutions–around the quality of the student-faculty interaction.

It is not surprising that the issue of faculty time has caused the most consternation throughout higher education. American colleges and universities have essentially thought about faculty time in the same way for the past 300 years.

When I first arrived as Vice President for Development at the University of Pennsylvania in 1986, I was looking through the archives, trying to absorb as much Penn history as I could, and I came upon a box of admission tickets from the 1700s. Realizing that this was before the invention of football, I was stumped as to their meaning, so I asked the University archivist. He explained that, in the eighteenth century, it was normal practice for students to receive, in return for what we could call their tuition payment, a packet of tickets for admission to class lectures. At the end of each lecture, the student would turn in a ticket to the instructor, who would in turn periodically remit the tickets to the financial office and get paid accordingly.

Now, although we're not as crude as that these days, we haven't fundamentally changed the way we operate with regard to faculty time. Terms such as "teaching loads," "overload fees," and "course units" are reminders of this. Essentially we have regarded faculty time as a fixed resource within a zero-sum game. In times of stable enrollments, the amount of faculty time available for all purposes is static, and, as new demands arise, time is simply traded off between one purpose and another. Even in periods of enrollment growth, increases in the sizes of the faculty have simply followed that growth, reacting to the need to keep class size down and sections open, without changing significantly the overall balance of commitments on the faculty. Reallocation of precious and over-committed faculty time has been virtually impossible.

Over the past decade, Knox has worked hard within a traditional framework to restructure demands on faculty time. However, whenever there has been a gain, a variety of new demands quickly arise to fill the space.

We began discussing this issue anew a year ago during our own campus roundtable sessions in conjunction with the Pew Higher Education Roundtable, and we achieved what I consider a breakthrough in thinking about faculty time at our Planning Priorities Council retreat last June. We recognized that the success of Knox College over the years has rested on the personally transforming impact on students that results from small-group and one-to-one interactions with professors who are enthusiastic about teaching and excited about research. We recognized that if we did not address the continuing pressures on faculty time, we were putting at risk the very qualities that have ensured Knox's distinctiveness and success.

Only by taking the initiative, changing the rules of the game, and moving out ahead of student demand, could the College really achieve a radical breakthrough that would protect the quality of the student-faculty relationship against erosion from other demands and enable the College to pursue steps toward exciting new intellectual territory.

We began to discuss the idea of incremental investments in academic support in order to relieve the pressure on faculty. Dean John Strassburger and I met throughout the summer to refine this concept into a strategy that could work for Knox. As a result, Knox College has undertaken, with approval of its Board of Trustees, an extraordinarily bold new initiative to add nine new full-time faculty positions, an expansion of more than 10 percent; to add associated new academic support positions and library resources as needed; and to identify immediately new academic space for offices, classrooms, seminar rooms, and labs to accommodate this expansion.

What is most exciting and innovative about this new faculty expansion is that it is being done for the express purpose of immediately enriching student-faculty interactions without the usual financial assurance of increased tuition revenue. It is an enrichment of our students' lives in the fullest sense of the word.

The investment in faculty positions brings about a direct enrichment in faculty time. One result of this action has been an increased willingness within the campus community to consider ways of allotting faculty time more effectively. In contrast to the traditional approach to restructuring, which begins by "closing the loop" on operations, this step opens the loop by a small but significant amount, providing faculty with more time as a way of ultimately building a more efficient institution—and one that maintains its focus on the quality of the learning engagement between faculty and students. Among the ideas now being considered with renewed vigor are the nature and extent of independent studies, and interdisciplinary programs that encourage a pooling of faculty efforts to provide an enriched perspective on societal issues.

We take a risk in pursuing this path, but we consider the payoff in the quality of teaching and learning to be worth the gamble. I am extremely proud to be a part of an institution with a Board that recognizes that the fundamental and defining asset of a college is its faculty—and that is capable of acting to address the issue of faculty time in an exciting new way.

Adapted from the Presidential Installation Address presented at Knox College, October 14, 1994.

Achieving Greater Coherence

by John Synodinos

President, Lebanon Valley College

"Cross Currents" argues that liberal arts colleges ought to take the lead in providing a more integrated curriculum. The essay suggests that the traditional organization of knowledge by academic disciplines is inadequate to the task of solving contemporary problems, and that the needs of a new century will demand multidisciplinary approaches to highly complex issues.

Today's liberal arts curriculum must prepare students for a world that increasingly is environmentally fragile, technologically driven, and international in its dimensions. What discipline is broad enough to encompass all the issues related to the impact of technology on society, or broad enough to understand the racial and ethnic violence that fragments and threatens our cities and nations? Almost every discipline in the curriculum could contribute to the education of a generation capable of dealing constructively with complex societal issues. But no single discipline is sufficient to foster the breadth of understanding and thought needed to be effective in today's world.

The growing frustration with the limits that the traditional disciplines impose has led some to call for ending the major. This is not likely to happen, nor should it. Disciplines contribute much to our society and to education. To abandon the careful work of centuries of scholarship would be foolish in the extreme. The argument for depth is still valid. There remains, however, a real need for greater integration and coherence in and among the courses that lie outside the major. Without a change in the organizational structure of the liberal arts college, it is unlikely that such coherence can be achieved.

There is little to counter the power of the academic departments. They are so strong that even those who find an interest in a multi-disciplinary area have no recourse but to seek the mantle of a department to explore new intellectual territory. What results is usually a program based primarily in one department that draws on the methods and data of other disciplines, leading to the creation of yet another major. Ideally, one

might think that a multi-disciplinary major could result in an enhancement of both breadth and depth in an undergraduate career. All too often, however, the multi-disciplinary major becomes just as confining in its scope and intent as the major rooted in a single discipline and department.

True disciplines do not arise overnight or even over a period of several years. It often takes centuries to build a body of literature and to develop common practices and methodologies characteristic of a discipline. While students who major in a multi-disciplinary area may pursue a given topic in some depth, they do not experience the in-depth study of a true discipline; ironically, they may graduate without experiencing genuine depth or breadth of learning.

What is needed is a structure that makes possible both applied study in a traditional discipline and cross-disciplinary study that fosters genuine breadth of learning through an undergraduate's career. Students and faculty would benefit from a curriculum that combines focused disciplinary study with studies that relate the disciplines to at least one of the broader issues that society must deal with now and in the coming century.

Liberal arts colleges must conceive and create a structural analog to the academic department—not an alternative, but a second home, designed to encourage and support faculty interests in multi-disciplinary studies. Universities have solved the problem in part by creating multi-disciplinary centers, entities that offer faculty what otherwise might be found only within their departments—space, secretarial help, budget, collegiality, even recognition. The experience of the universities, however, suggests that we should anticipate considerable resistance to similar types of structures at a liberal arts college.

Until they can develop institutional structures that parallel and complement that of the academic department, liberal arts colleges will find it difficult to begin serious discussions among faculty about gaining greater coherence and integration in the non-major portion of the curriculum. The organizational impediment is, however, but one of several. The training and education of faculty within the academic disciplines is certainly a factor. Faculty reward structures—indeed the very process and criteria that colleges and universities use to hire faculty—all work against efforts to integrate the non-major portion of the curriculum. The culture of the academy clearly favors the specialist.

Any hope of achieving a more integrated curriculum must offer specific strategies to overcome the wide range of impediments to multi-disciplinary study. Liberal arts colleges must support the creation of new organizational structures, modify the reward process, allocate faculty development differently, reexamine how they hire, modify how they promote and grant tenure, change requirements for graduation, and question whether it is ever right to approve a single course without asking how it relates to other courses. In short, liberal arts colleges must reinvent themselves. Only then, and with great difficulty, will meaningful curricular change occur.

A Different Vantage

by Richard Sisson
Provost, The Ohio State University

My perspective on "Cross Currents," the lead essay of this issue, differs somewhat from others whose names appear at the end of that essay. I was not part of the special roundtable discussion that brought together leaders of liberal arts colleges to discuss the issues facing their institutions. I was, however, one of several from other areas of higher education who was asked to read and comment on an early draft of the essay. From a different vantage, my thoughts parallel—and, I would hope, complement—many of those that the leaders of liberal arts colleges have themselves expressed.

First, the problems:

1. Competition has become much more fierce. Large universities can and have and will over time develop high-quality and distinctive honors programs (at Ohio State, we are seriously thinking about developing a more comprehensive and integrated honors curriculum) which approximate the culture of a liberal arts college, but which have much more flexibility in menus and can provide an exemplary education at much lower cost. Research-intensive universities will increasingly involve undergraduates in research experiences that make real the distinctive character and work of such universities: discovery and invention. Liberal arts col-

leges will find it increasingly difficult to emulate this work in a substantive way, particularly in the sciences and areas of technology. This is a permanent feature; this is a permanent change.

2. Students are increasingly oriented to market considerations. This may not mark a permanent change in preferences, but it probably will be with us for some time. The new global economy, the changing character of production, the broader democratization of excellence in undergraduate education—all will have a lasting impact on the undergraduate education marketplace.

3. As it becomes more expensive to maintain large applicant pools, and the quality of applicant pools shrinks (a trend to which "Cross Currents" alludes), there will be a long-term impact not only on the quality of students but also on the quality of faculty that can be recruited and retained.

What is to be done? There are several things, I think:

1. Liberal arts colleges must devote more energy to the development and utilization of learning technologies. They have a need, and this need could be transformed into a competitive advantage. Not everyone should be developing the "wheel." These institutions should become discoverers and inventors in the area of learning technologies, and they could assume an advantage over their bigger brothers and sisters in this regard.

2. Liberal arts colleges should develop networks among themselves, as well as with distinguished research-intensive universities, in selective ways and probably selective areas in distance learning. They should have "distance partnering." Obviously, there have to be limits on such arrangements, or the distinctiveness of the college community and its curriculum would be lost. But much can be done without coming close to that threshold.

3. Liberal arts colleges will probably have to specialize, especially in areas of the sciences. A liberal arts college will not be able to offer great physics, great chemistry, great biology, all at once. Some, such as Bennington College, are evidently going to do more in the way of emphasizing the creative arts with other areas of knowledge playing distinctly supportive roles.

4. Liberal arts colleges should invest in areas that are "becoming." I have in mind here such currently "interdisciplinary" things as cognitive science, information technology, the new political economy, and learning with great creative artists who would be in residence for a period of time. There are new disciplines emerging; liberal arts colleges should stake out leads in selective areas. They have to be selective in getting ahead of the curve in substantive knowledge and type of experience. The former would also assist recruitment of outstanding faculty who endeavor increasingly to find these kinds of innovative clusters and arrangements in larger institutions.

I am not convinced that liberal arts colleges need to be protected as a matter of principle; I do think they can be assisted, however, in their own adaptation. These valued institutions are capable of staking out areas of leadership that will not only assist in their vitality and survival but contribute in fundamental ways to the direction and quality of higher education nationally.

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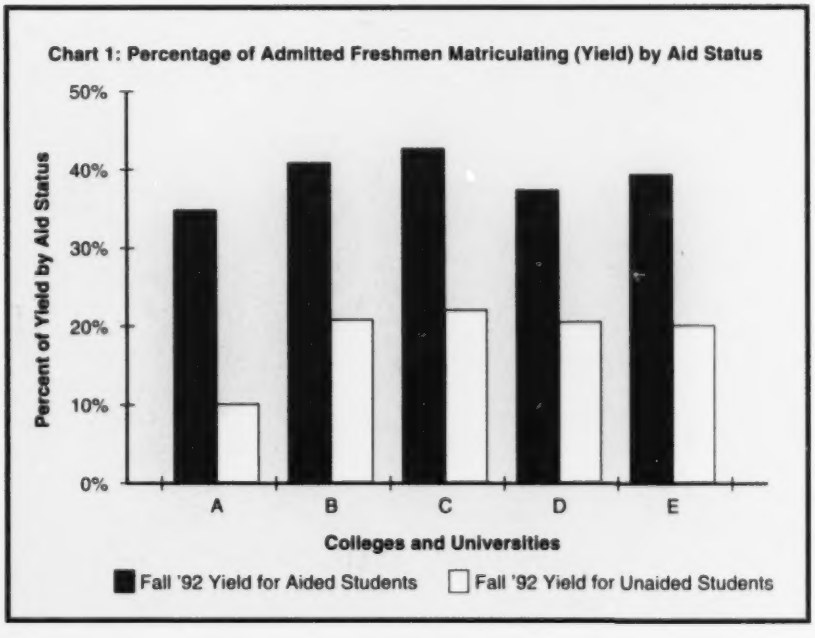
Giving Discounts, Getting Satisfaction: An Analysis of Institutions and their Students

In this issue of *Policy Perspectives*, we have focused on how a changing market for higher education is shaping institutional finances and programs. In unlikely combination, colleges and universities are being asked to do more with less—simultaneously wrestling with the demand for "customer satisfaction" and with those customers' demands for greater discounts.

To examine how this increased use of discounting has produced a shift in the financial dynamics of many institutions, we obtained detailed admissions and financial aid data from five private institutions—three liberal arts colleges and two universities. The five institutions range from those that face significant financial challenges to those that are holding their own. All are well regarded and are located in four different states in the Atlantic and Southern regions of the United States. The earliest information available from four of the institutions pertains to classes entering in the fall of 1987; for the fifth institution, the earliest data is for the class entering in the fall of 1988. For simplicity's sake, we will refer to the early-year data throughout as "fall 1987." In all cases, the most recent available data pertains to classes entering in the fall of 1992.

Concern with maintaining enrollments is often translated into a need to maintain yield rate—the percentage of admitted students who decide to matriculate. All five institutions experienced a decline of yield, in one case by more than 9 percentage points. As a result, each college or university found itself having to increase applicant pools, or admit a large proportion of applicants, or do both, just to maintain enrollment. Through such practices, College C, a liberal arts institution, significantly increased the size of its freshman class during the period studied. In contrast, College A and University B experienced large decreases in freshman class size, while University D and College E saw little change in the size of the freshman class.

In addition to declines in yield, all five institutions experienced substantial disparity between the yield from aided and unaided students—that is, between those to whom they offered discounts and those they expected to pay the full tuition as charged (see Chart 1). In each case, the yield for unaided students lagged 18 to 25 percentage points behind that for aided students. The disparity was especially pronounced in College A, which also exhibited the lowest yield within the sample set for both aided and unaided students in 1992. Even College C, which registered the highest yield of the group in both categories, matriculated only 21 percent of students to whom it did not offer financial aid, while 44 percent of the aided students matriculated. Aid was clearly a condition of enrollment for a substantial proportion of each institution's first-year students.



Also telling was the change in the proportion of full-tuition-paying students in the freshman classes of 1987 and 1992. All but one of the institutions—College E—offered discounts to the majority of freshmen in 1992 (see Chart 2). In that year, University D reduced tuition for seven out of ten freshmen, and College A reduced tuition for nearly nine out of ten freshmen.

The critical issue underlying the enrollment data for all five institutions is whether they gen-

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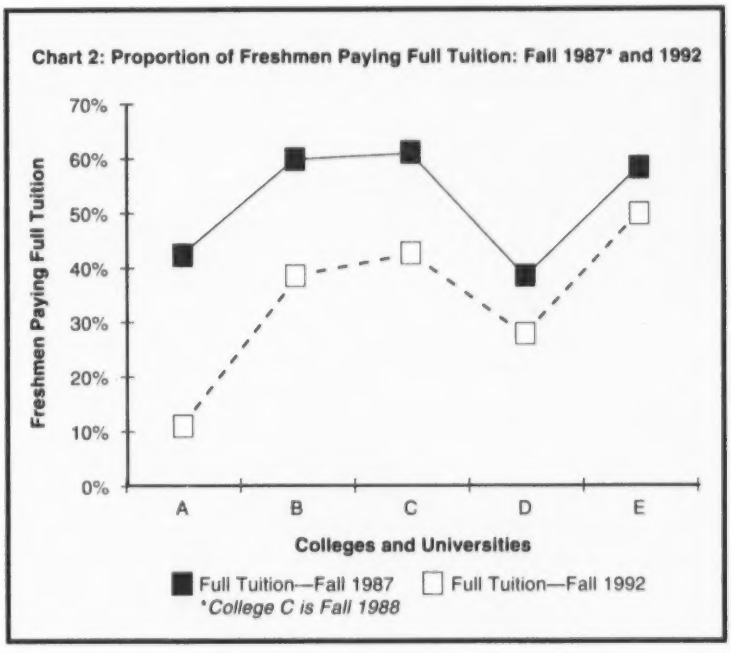
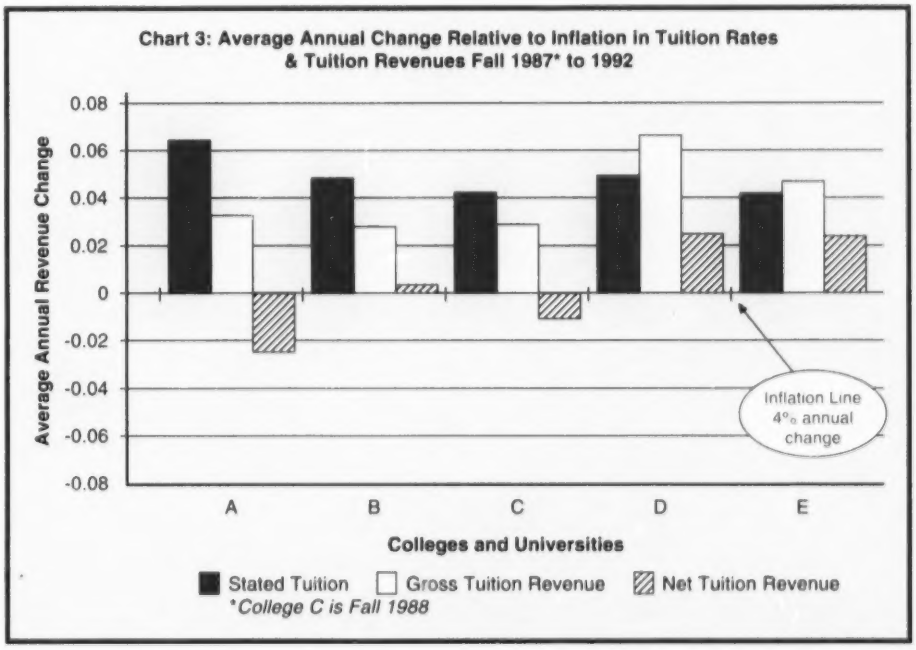
erate sufficient revenue to maintain the quality of their programs, to compete for faculty, and to sustain facilities, libraries, and campuses. Between Academic Years 1987-88 and 1992-93, all five institutions increased their stated tuition and gross tuition revenue at rates that exceeded inflation (see Chart 3). Of the five, however, only University D and College E experienced a significant increase in net tuition income after inflation as measured by the GNP. University B essentially kept pace with inflation. For Colleges A and C, declining yields of admitted students, falling freshman enrollments, and deep discounting combined to produce a measurable loss in real income despite increases in stated tuition and gross tuition revenue. University D and, especially, College E came up winners because they sustained or increased the size of their freshman classes *and* increased their net tuition revenues.



If issues of increased discounting represent one side of the enrollment coin, the flip side is whether or not students are satisfied with the education they receive. Students who are not satisfied with their experiences will not remain with an institution and will not become loyal alumni whose financial support and word-of-mouth recruiting will benefit the institution. In the spring of 1993, the Higher Education Data Sharing (HEDS) Consortium received completed surveys from 6,464 seniors scheduled to graduate from 20 private colleges and universities. Taken together, their responses assessing the quality of their undergraduate experience provide an important insight into the nature and scope of student satisfaction and dissatisfaction.



The survey sample consisted primarily of traditional-aged students attending classes full-time and living on or near campus. The sample does not claim to be representative of graduating seniors or of private institutions in general. The responses, however, were sufficiently numerous to point up the nexus of concerns, interests, and complaints that framed these students' evaluations of their undergraduate experiences.

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Through the HEDS senior survey, students were asked about career and personal goals; grade point average; family income; ethnicity, citizenship, and gender; work experience while in school; reliance on financial aid; areas of major study; and indicators of satisfaction with the institution attended.

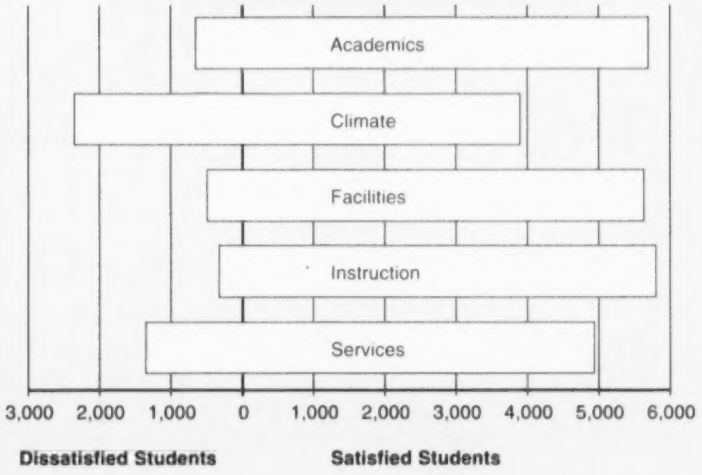
The good news is that the overwhelming majority of the students who responded were, in fact, pleased with the quality of their experiences. Seven out of every eight students (87 percent) reported being "Generally" or "Very" satisfied, and only one in five respondents (21 percent) claimed that they would not attend the same institution if they could relive their undergraduate experience.

For the purposes of this study, the elements by which students evaluated their undergraduate experiences were divided into five general categories: academics, climate, facilities, instruction, and services. The area of greatest student dissatisfaction was "climate," which includes measures of the campus social environment and student involvement in the affairs of the institution. While 3,856 students expressed satisfaction with this category, another 2,428—two-thirds the number of contented respondents—were less than pleased with the climate provided by their institutions. It should be noted, however, that the relationship of climate to overall satisfaction or dissatisfaction appears weak: less than 18 percent of those expressing dissatisfaction with their institution's climate registered dissatisfaction with their undergraduate experience in general. In each of the four remaining categories—perhaps most significantly in academics and instruction—the numbers of satisfied students substantially outweighed those expressing dissatisfaction (see Chart 4).

The HEDS data suggest that not only is student satisfaction an important issue for colleges and universities seeking to maintain enrollment, but that among the increasingly varied offerings of undergraduate education, academics and instruction are still what matter most to students. Discounting, as a means to maintain enrollment, is no less important but remains a troubling and costly strategy for many institutions.

Note: The data and analysis that follow were published originally in the "Landscape" section of two issues of Change *magazine—July/August 1994, and September/October 1994. The data have been drawn from private institutions participating in the Higher Education Data Sharing (HEDS) Consortium.*

Chart 4: Number of Seniors Satisfied/Dissatisfied with Five Areas of Undergraduate Education



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